

## Chapter Three

### *Principium individuationis*

In Lovecraft there is an unusual theory of something that, with modern audacity, we could call the subject. However, it is a *haunted subject* that can never say "I" without simultaneously making the ominous voices of the most unfathomable folds of the cosmos speak. However, this statement requires some preliminary clarifications. It is a fairly recent matter in philosophy to call "subject" the *hypokeimenon* that is then identified as a *substratum* coinciding with an apperception, or later with an individual (self-)consciousness founded in some sort of identity. In the strictest sense this conception of the subject is post-Cartesian (probably Kantian) even if medieval thought might have genealogically contributed to it.<sup>84</sup> Even so, setting out from an identitarian (transcendental) consciousness, the notion of subject (and the same goes for certain derivatives such as "subjectivity" and "mode of subjectivation") has been expanded in contemporary philosophy until coming to mean almost the opposite of the core notion.

In fact, in 1958 Émile Benveniste defined "subjectivity" as "the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as 'subject.' It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that that 'subjectivity,' whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language".<sup>85</sup> From this point of view, the "psychic unity" that defines the subject that transcends itself

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<sup>84</sup> As a first entry into the topic, cf. Olivier Boulnois (ed.), *Généalogies du sujet. De Saint Anselme à Malebranche*.

<sup>85</sup> Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," 224.



setting out from the speaking *ego* is radically refuted by Lovecraft's postulates, since for him the only possibility is a total psycho-physical multiplication. On the other hand, for Lovecraft, language is not the privileged operator of the subject, which can also become manifest through para- and supra-linguistic means.

However, it is possible to use this category in a general sense. Even versions directly opposed on the particulars can still explain something about the principle of (de-)individuation underlying the problem of the so-called subject as its common background. All told, if it is taken seriously, this category is inseparable from the cosmological structure into which it is always inserted. In this sense, if the modern subject is a subsidiary of the Galilean universe and its mathematizing heritage, then the de-subjection proclaimed in twentieth-century continental philosophy is linked (sometimes explicitly, sometimes secretly, but never in a way that aids its ambitions) with the outcome, not only of Galileanism, but also of Einsteinian physics and the developments of quantum mechanics.

Lovecraft's concept of the subject is not irrelevant to these problems, and is markedly more radical than many other attempts to define it in contemporary philosophy. In fact, in Lovecraft's conception the relation between cosmology and the theory of the subject is absolutely and necessarily one of mutual dependence. Of course, the writer from Providence did not articulate a theory as such, but one can be deduced, for example, from the "great tales." Let us take the case of "The Shadow Out of Time." In this story we can see how he articulates a philosophy of the subject entailing a series of ruling principles and adequately deducible corollaries.

First, there is a *principle of temporal dislocation*: "My conception of time—my ability to distinguish between consecutiveness and simultaneousness—seemed subtly disordered; so that I formed chimerical notions about living in one age and casting one's mind all over eternity for knowledge of past and future ages."<sup>86</sup> This proposition is clearly influenced by modern physics, as the

<sup>86</sup> Lovecraft, "The Shadow out of Time", in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, 342.



story's protagonist constantly states: "Dr. Albert Einstein, they said, was rapidly reducing time to the status of a mere dimension."<sup>87</sup> The classical notion of the subject made temporality coincide with a *unifying coordinate*, variable but logically present, guarantor of succession and of an identity marked by the *finitude* of vital synchrony, as expressed by death and circumscribed by a pure temporal continuum.

However, for the Lovecraftian subject, the now is just another moment of its temporal flow. Its point of subjectivation is unaware of the identity of finite time as gnoseological experience (though not as extreme factuality). The subject takes place in a non-temporality that is not an *a priori* condition but, on the contrary, the real possibility that a subject position may live, at once or in succession (it is unimportant) in various temporalities where it may "take a position" without establishing a fixed identity. It is then conceivable—based on the achievements of the Great Race—for the Lovecraftian subject to establish a position in a prehuman world, or also to slide into unknown eons, objectivating itself in the body of a species that will only exist in the remotest future of Earth.

Setting aside technical explanations, this displacement is possible, in the last instance, because all of the instants of the past and future already exist in *this* instant; the chronological interpretation is but an *a posteriori* consequence of a finite consciousness. If time does not define the subject, then neither does space. The subject can anchor itself in any point in the universe where some kind of intellect may arise, and, as we will see, even if no corporeality is there to support it. Lovecraft often likened this experience to schizophrenia, and the story's protagonist constantly asks himself if this subjective experience does not belong to the darkest documents of psychopathology.

It is in this sense that Lovecraft's transformation of schizophrenia in many ways surpasses the guiding propositions of such an important book as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Whereas the French thinkers conceived the path of schizophrenia as a passage from *Homo natura* to *Homo historia*,

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



one where Nietzsche could, in a letter to Burckhardt, declare "every name in history is I,"<sup>88</sup> in Lovecraft schizophrenia dissolves all the limits of historicity to constitute the subject in the temporality of the pre-historic and the post-historic, of the non-temporal more than the untimely. The position of the subject finds its most appropriate locus in the immensity of a time that exhausts itself until it converges with an eternal twilight. History and all its names, human and inhuman, are only a brief flash in the cosmic becoming of a time defining the place of a subject who manifests where the intelligible happens independently of the Name, freed of any need for the existence of humanity as an anchoring substrate for a coordinate of subjectivation.

As is well known, in Lovecraft there is what we could call—following a perceptive philosopher and linguist—something like a *rule of annals* since it is always a matter of historiography, archeology, or philology, but only as means to inquire about what ultimately takes us beyond all *arche* and all *logos* or writing. For example, concerning schizophrenia: "My results, aided by psychologists, historians, anthropologists, and mental specialists of wide experience, and by a study that included all records of split personalities from the days of daemoniac-possession legends to the medically realistic present, at first bothered me more than they consoled me."<sup>89</sup> However, the subjective experience of the protagonist of "The Shadow out of Time" is not the product of any proof to be found in the chronicles of human and medical sciences, but of the action of the Great Race (the extraterrestrial colonizers of the Earth).

However, what Lovecraft retains from the old accursed demonology contained in fictional books such as *Cultes des Goules* by the Comte d'Erlette, the *De Vermis Mysteriis* of Ludwig Prinn, the *Unausprechlichen Kulten* of Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt or even the feared *Necronomicon* is not just the radical principle that any subject may, by means of certain rites, allow for the Other to become a dissonant Voice in its own thinking. It is more so the defense of the theorem that any subject is not so much thought

<sup>88</sup> Deleuze/Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Lovecraft, "The Shadow out of Time", 343.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

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by the Other as it is the seat of the voices of the Others as autonomous entities formative (and not only receptive) of a subject position.

"Demoniac possession" is fictional for Lovecraft because demons do not exist. There are only Other subjectivities that colonize thought and act, in that instant, as producers of a subject position. In the guise of demonology, then, history shows the traces of forces at work that go beyond history. Their footprints remain in dusty books or obscure manuscripts. These material proofs are but the clue that leads to the *realism* of the objective presence of multiple thought-entities in any consciousness whatsoever. A subject is, then, the site of manifestation for a cosmologically intra- and supra-temporal multiloquism.

From this follows the *principle of the insignificance of human life*, as we contemplate the problem of the extinction of the human species. Lovecraft wrote: "Primal myth and modern delusion joined in their assumption that mankind is only one—perhaps the least—of the highly evolved and dominant races of this planet's long and largely unknown career."<sup>90</sup> The Great Race existed millions of years before humans (and even before life as we know it) appeared on Earth, and will certainly outlast it. In fact, "There were records of strange orders of beings which had peopled the world in forgotten pasts, and frightful chronicles of grotesque-bodied intelligences which would people it millions of years after the death of the last human being."<sup>91</sup>

The human species, and *a fortiori* life itself in the biological forms known to humanity, are not necessary for the existence of the subject. A subject does not inevitably exist in a *human* form, ergo subjectivity has nothing to do with the human character of its bearer. The possible biological humanity of a body is only an accident for the subject. That is why, against a decidedly modern philosophical tradition, the extinction of the human species is not any sort of obstacle for a theory of the subject. We could go even farther and say that, to develop an authentic theory of the subject in Lovecraft, we need to completely jettison the preju-

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.



dice in favor of human existence as the support for subjectivity. The human species will face its unavoidable disappearance from the face of the Earth and, despite that, the theory of the subject will not be modified one whit, since its *structure* is not based on the *accidentality* of any form of life, known or to come.

This is why Lovecraft affirmed: "Now and then certain captives were permitted to meet other captive minds seized from the future—to exchange thoughts with consciousnesses living a hundred or a thousand or a million years before or after their own ages."<sup>92</sup> Here we find the *principle of dislocation between body and intellect*.<sup>93</sup> The subject does not constitute its identity based on a biological substrate that would be its univocal and proper body. The propriety of the subject is not constituted by its own (proper) body but by a capacity to take a position, in multiple ways, in any body of the past or future (for Lovecraft, as we have seen, this is a meaningless distinction). Therefore, a subject is not a body. Nor does it possess or inhabit a body; it would better be said to *position* itself in a body that, by definition, is *improper* to it even in its momentary appropriation.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>93</sup> This does not amount to upholding a dualist principle (inadmissible for Lovecraft) of scission between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Even if, in my view, dualism (despite its contemporary philosophical condemnation), is not necessarily unacceptable *per se*, Lovecraft, in his maximalist version, grants ontological primacy to a material intellectuality that does not depend on the body, while not being separable from cosmic substance. In this sense, we must not confuse the principle of individuation as the positioning of a subject, on one hand, with the phenomenology of the relation between a body (or even life) with the intellective sphere (a legitimate object of inquiry in itself) on the other. Here, in the contingency of the coincidence of a subject with a body, the logical interlinking is not ultimately founded in the individuality at stake but rather in the very constitution of the general form of the cosmos, declinable without an ontological fracture between matter and intellective activity. Of course, this is only possible in the maximalist version of Lovecraft's Mythos. In its more conservative minimalist versions, which are also less present in the *Scripta* and its glosses, intellective activity is sometimes reduced to the brain, as for example in "The Whisperer in Darkness." In this case, of course, there is no dualist principle at work, but simply a divorce of body and brain that presupposes the latter as seat of the mind, or, at the least (being more careful), as a necessary component of the manifesting preservation of the mind.



Ultimately, we could maintain that *intellective extinction* is the proper form of the finitude of the subject as Lovecraft understands it. The texts can bring us to think so as we read conjectures of the following sort: "Thus the Great Race came to be, while the myriad minds sent backward were left to die in the horror of strange shapes."<sup>94</sup> In this way, when a subject is constituted by the irruption of multiple otherness in some intellect of some time, a *forma mentis* is displaced, sent to the past and condemned to extinction. The mind, then, can die when it is not in the right conditions to migrate towards another bodily support of some sort. But all of this, it should be said, is the minimalist and conformist version of Lovecraft.

The maximalist form was risked by Lovecraft as a fascinating theory: "It sought likewise to fathom the past years and origin of that black, aeon-dead orb in far space whence its own mental heritage had come—for the mind of the Great Race was older than its bodily form."<sup>95</sup> In the maximalist hypothesis, Lovecraft maintains the possibility that the subject is originally *in-corporeal*, being the in-corporation of an ongoing avatar, the outcome of a sort of involutionary becoming of the form known as the Great Race. In other words, there would be something like an intellective phylogenesis wherein all thinking is thinking of other thinking, and where every subject is positioned by another. If the mind precedes the body, the subject precedes any biological substrate. We have room to speculate beyond Lovecraft himself (though in a way completely authorized by the Mythos) that it could survive not only the extinction of life but even of matter.

One thing is certain in all this: against certain contemporary tendencies, Lovecraft did not conceive the existence of a subject that would owe its position to a determinate biological substrate which would be its origin.<sup>96</sup> Subjectivity is not the result of grad-

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<sup>94</sup> Lovecraft, "The Shadow out of Time", 354.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Let's be clear: such a stance can be deduced from the Mythos, but this does not necessarily imply that it was Lovecraft's personal conviction so far as his extra-literary philosophical beliefs are concerned (supposing such a distinction is legitimate; but, judging by the author's letters and essays, we are authorized



ual emergence or the evolutionary complication of a biological nucleus to which it is indebted, or of which it is the nascent or prosthetic form. On the contrary, the physical foundation is but a means for the manifestation of the subject-position that, in some cases, needs the sensible form for the intake of the natural world (but not for the comprehension of this world or for its own intellectual substance).

The minimalist thesis presupposes the indefinite but not infinite migration of the subjects of the Great Race into "posthuman entities"<sup>97</sup> even beyond the Earth: "Later, as the earth's span closed, the transferred minds would again migrate through time and space—to another stopping-place in the bodies of the bulbous vegetable entities of Mercury. But there would be races after them, clinging pathetically to the cold planet and burrowing to its horror-filled core, before the utter end."<sup>98</sup> Entropy at the level of the known universe would also put an end to any subject-position, preventing its being considered truly eternal.

On this point, Lovecraft seems to approach positions such as that of Sigmund Freud, when the latter adopted the thesis that highlighted "the most universal endeavor of all living substance (*alles Lebenden*)—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world (*zur Ruhe der anorganischen Welt*)."<sup>99</sup> Strictly speaking,

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to distinguish between the Lovecraft of the Mythos—the object of this book—and the Lovecraft of the non-literary texts).

<sup>97</sup> We can see that Lovecraft was already consciously cultivating posthumanism, which is a philosophical tendency older than its contemporary promoters tend to imagine in their claim to have discovered something new. We should also appreciate the ways in which Lovecraft anticipates the theses of transhumanist thinkers. For one involuntary and unconscious inheritor of the Lovecraftian Mythos, cf. Raymond Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*.

<sup>98</sup> Lovecraft, "The Shadow out of Time", 360.

<sup>99</sup> Freud, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, 76 (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 256). Strange exceptions in the world of thought have taken over Freud's radical thesis. However, the reach of this thesis is limited to life on Earth and, although it could, with certain qualifications, be extended to the whole of the cosmos—even if only due to the simple fact that one could claim that biological life is not limited to our planet—his proposition depends on the misunderstanding that makes of the inorganic the bio-ontological basis from which life emerges,



Freud only thought at the scale of the Earth, whereas Lovecraft thinks at the scale of an infinite universe. The final corruption is, therefore, the result of an entropy that irremediably degrades the course of the evolution of the intellectual subject of the Great Race, leaving it no other path than its inevitable termination in the dark abysses of the end of the cosmos. Even so, expanded as necessary, the Freudian thesis could seem adaptable to Lovecraft's position. However, from Lovecraft's perspective, we would not be dealing with a return to the inorganic beginning, since such an ontologically prior thing does not exist. Before matter was the immaterial mind of the Great Race.

That is why, in other stories such as "The Whisperer in Darkness", we find theories about "the arcana of basic entity," that is, the mystery of "why half the great temporary stars of history had flared forth."<sup>100</sup> This inquiry leads to the possibility of "outer cosmic realms" where the figure of Yog-Sothoth rules. These would be beyond any concrete material universe, at the very gates of the existence of plural universes. That is to say, beyond the entropy that inevitably encompasses our universe, every subject has its originary position in primordial phenomena of intellectivity such as Yog-Sothoth that, by definition, are eternal and beyond any physical or intellectual extinction. At the same time they do not constitute an immaterial or transcendent God-form. Any theory of the subject, then, finds in the Yog-Sothoth form the stenographic version of its originary abyss, and the most primordial trace with which to measure its apparently precarious material existence.

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and towards which it tends in its extinction. Freud's biologizing nihilism is no match for a thesis defending the existence of a subject-position that precedes and survives the extinction of life, *both organic and inorganic*. However, in Lovecraft, this subjective position does not imply an idealism since, beyond the opposition between the organic and the inorganic, the writer from Providence retains a determined philosophical attitude that may perfectly well be called *materialism*, understood as the impossibility of the existence of any intellectual form that is not anchored in the material laws of the universe, even in its most extreme and disruptive modalities.

<sup>100</sup> Lovecraft, "The Whisperer in Darkness", in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, 251.



We could therefore say that any subject is mortal not so much due to the finite nature of life (as modern philosophy has usually thought) but rather because of the threat weighing on it from intellectual death. However, the true horror is to be found in Lovecraft when we realize the intellectual immortality of the *subject-structure* that precedes and will succeed any possible form of life. This or that subject will not survive, but there will always, *eternally*, be a subject-position to be occupied in some dimension (which is absolutely neither origin nor end) of the abysses beyond time.

Taking all this into consideration, we could say that Lovecraft's appeal to "madness" is but the cipher that sums up the point where the classical subject is dissolved, only to be opened up to a true subversion of the subjective. In some sense, the writer was unwilling to accept its consequences except through an ironclad pessimism. The cosmos and the *surplus cosmos* implied by the overflowing of all the boundaries of space-time (it does not matter if these are objectively or transcendently understood) situates the subject in a completely new position, where there is neither any longer a world that could constitute an *a priori* nor on the other hand one that could transform subjectivity into an objectivated entity.

At the limit, the paradigmatic subjective position is even *acosmic* and is situated in a point where dispossession of all attributes leads to the dissolution of any effective difference between world and subject (replaced by a privation of world and an ouster of any univocal singularity). Here subjective manifestation only coincides with an infinite potential that, nevertheless, is permanently actual somewhere in the multiverse, and is, therefore, capable of becoming its opposite. (As we can see, at this level of analysis, the principle of contradiction lacks all ontological consistency; a principle of this sort can only persist in a bounded continuum.)

Thus the subject never coincides with its individual consciousness. Lovecraftian subjectivity, in its maximalist version, is always constituted in the radical exteriority of ultra-time and without-space. There, the subject is as distant from a consciousness as the multi-dimensional abysses that can *crack* a body's



own capacity to support (from the primordial hominid to the most advanced species of posthuman beetles imagined by Lovecraft). In a sense, the fearsome Yog-Sothoth can be conceived as the *Ursubjekt*, as well as the ownmost and final subjective form—of all subjectivity, past or to come. However, even his own subjective existence is but the result of temporal chance and it is admissible to suppose that even he must be inhabited by some *crack* for him to be able to manifest as a subjective parameter. We see that, if subjectivity is eminently an in-human property (that can certainly become visible), it is also true that, in the human world, in the same way, the structure that upholds it is constituted around a void that points in the direction of the absolutely infinite (for this theoretical position, Lovecraft would use the convenient but deceptive notion of “madness”).

Psychoanalysis (as the most advanced modern theory of the subject) retained sexuality in its anthropic concept of the psyche as a *remainder* that, even in mathematizing and literalizing writings, is the mark of the signifier-letter-subject on the body. Lovecraft's rejection of sexual matters has been pointed out many times; it has not been noticed, however, that such a diatribe, aside from being monotonous, has obscured the possibility of uncovering the writer's most radical position. It could be claimed that in the non-coincidence of the subject with any human corporeality (real, imagined, or symbolized) and, *a fortiori*, with any corporeality whatsoever, Lovecraft sought to establish the completely superfluous character of sexuality as a subjective remainder.

Accordingly, not even the letter is a match for the cosmology of the Lovecraftian subject, because the ultimate subjective structure is beyond all human language and, in the end, beyond all language. In this way, Lovecraft's subject is but a *principle of individuation* that, only momentarily, allows for the manifestation of a point of intellectual attribution whose source is, in the very act of its presence, a vector indicating a point of passage (not to be confused with a lack) towards an other of the Other (a gesture that, as we know, is inconceivable in the most polished psychoanalytic theory).

As we have seen, the guiding principles of the Lovecraftian



subject involve calling all forms of identity into question. They also propose intellective multiplication as the explanation of what, in another context, has been called the Unconscious; they destitute the validity of the principle of non-contradiction and divorce the subject from individual consciousness, and, of course, from the biological substrate. From this perspective, a subject comes to be when it individualizes itself as the non-substantial position of opening to the multiplicity of voices constitutive of the subject-structure.

Lovecraft arrives at all of this by reactivating the forces of Myth. He needs them to move forward on this path of thinking. For philosophy, however (though not necessarily for other disciplines), it is possible to abstract from the material elements of the Mythos (from unfathomable extraterrestrials to the shoggoths or the Tcho-Tchos of the Plateau of Leng), retaining instead the radical challenge of the writer from Providence to any theory of the cosmos or of a subject that can inhabit it.

In the ancient world, Homer declared: "the gods know all (*theoi de te panta isasin*)."<sup>101</sup> The statement certainly did not refer to a kind of divine omnipotence that only the Christianity that came after would propound. It merely refers to the designs that the gods exercise over humans, whose actions could not be hidden from the Olympians. Even so, Homer was beginning to walk a path that ultimately leads to thinking an omniscient God in a *closed* universe. This is impossible in Lovecraft's universe, not only because in place of the ancient gods we find entities of various species, but above all because the concept of *absolute infinitude* that Lovecraft proposes is unfathomable for a god, even if only because *transfinitude* passes through it as well, and prevents it from fathoming itself. Likewise, any Absolute knowledge becomes impossible here by definition, not because of the limitations of finite beings as continually underlined by modern philosophy, but due to the very properties of the multiverse as such.

Thus taking Lovecraft's legacy seriously certainly does not

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<sup>101</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, IV, 379. For an understanding of the gnostic context of the Homeric pronouncement, see the fundamental volume edited by María Estela Guevara de Álvarez, *Antología gnómica de la literatura griega*, 127-128.

imply believing in his Mythos (as some nevertheless do), but understanding the place of thinking that this Mythos sets up, the discourses that it makes possible, and above all, the unequalled challenges that they pose to anyone who tries to inscribe himself in the inveterate tradition of philosophy. On the other hand, this certainly does not imply a kind of *Entmythologisierung* of the Lovecraftian Mythos of the sort that a certain contemporary biblical exegesis has attempted with the Christian myth.<sup>102</sup> Quite the contrary: the Mythos is a constitutive part for the understanding of this writer's thinking, since only the Mythos allows us to access the dynamic of the propositional structure at work in Lovecraftian prose. The philosophical task consists of making these latent theorematized structures visible and formalizable.

Philosophy still has the pending task of thinking a theory of the subject that rises to the challenge of an absolutely infinite universe<sup>103</sup> (and here, as I have noted, the debate about the absolute or absolutely observable character of the universe decidedly renews its importance). What would a subject mean within the framework of a multiverse? The very possibility of philosophy's survival hangs on this question, since if it is not up to thinking this challenge, it will inevitably be unable to overcome the most acute and accurate questioning it has undergone on behalf of *antiphilosophy*.

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<sup>102</sup> A gesture that may also be detected in those philosophers who, today, approach Lovecraft while seeking to exclude the more "inconvenient" elements of the Mythos in the name of a poorly understood Enlightenment thinking, which reproduces all the aporias that the exegesis of Christian mythology encountered as it followed a similar path.

<sup>103</sup> In this sense, the studies of Alexandre Koyré are an absolutely essential point of departure, though today they are insufficient due to the new theoretical challenges posed by physics and mathematics, as they have passed through the cleavage of antiphilosophy. Cf. Alexandre Koyré, *From The Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. One of the most serious attempts along these lines, Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, nevertheless suffers from being anchored in history and eventual politics, and so cannot meet Lovecraft's challenge.



## Epilogue

### *Horror (vacui)*

About the becomings-multiple that literature often proposes, Gilles Deleuze writes that they may coexist "at every level, following the doorways, thresholds, and zones that make up the entire universe, as in Lovecraft's powerful oeuvre."<sup>104</sup> In fact, what I have tried to show here is how, from the sacred geography of power to dreaming, passing through the subject and the space-time continuum, Lovecraft's propositions involve an unusual challenge for philosophy, showing how it must situate itself in the framework of a universe postulated as an absolute infinity. Certainly, in such a universe human life-forms are relatively insignificant, in a way that frees them from all necessity of ontological existence in the cosmos. But, in a more determining way, Lovecraft comes to posit the exigency of thinking a philosophy beyond any life-form and beyond any distinction between the organic and the inorganic.

In the Lovecraftian universe, life is an absolute accident (to put it in a way that is only apparently paradoxical) and cannot be the *foundation* (which is not to say the *object*) of any metaphysics or science. Indeed, in the autumn of 1933, William Crawford requested an autobiographical essay from Lovecraft, which remained unpublished during the author's lifetime. In this text, whose original manuscript is preserved in the John Hay Library at Brown University in Providence, Lovecraft indicates a critical turning point in his concept of horror: "The 'punch' of a truly weird tale is simply some violation or transcending of fixed cosmic law—an imaginative escape from palling reality—hence *phenomena* rather than *persons* are the logical 'heroes'."<sup>105</sup>

For Lovecraft, characters, that is, life-forms, are ontologically irrelevant against the power of the phenomena that preceded

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<sup>104</sup> *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Lovecraft, "Some Notes on a Nonentity," in *Collected Essays*, vol. 5, pp. 207-

211. Emphasis is Lovecraft's own.

them and will succeed them. Time, space, but also the subject and some attributes, apparently those most proper to the living, such as dreaming or consciousness, do not necessarily depend on a support in living corporeality. Can philosophy rise to this challenge to thinking? In this sense, one of Lovecraft's central categories, the *weird* (so difficult to translate into other languages), located somewhere between the poles of what is alien to the earthly world and the preternaturally mysterious, also defines an ontological region beyond the human and *a fortiori* beyond life.

Thus *horror*, as the supreme concept of Lovecraftian literature, does not simply mean fright before the aberrant or the unknown. It is above all the designation that Lovecraft uses to indicate a thickness in Being that cannot be apprehended according to the traditional categories of metaphysics or science, and which demands a new effort of understanding. At the same time it also designates the specifically human *Stimmung* at the discovery of humanity's true anthropic non-place in the cosmos. The sole fundamental attunement that defines a human who becomes conscious of the dimensions of the challenge that thought must confront before the abysses of an absolutely infinite universe is horror. Admittedly, it is not a human passion. Horror exemplifies the end of the cycle of passions bound to finitude, such as anxiety or boredom. No existentialism is possible in this framework, where existence is postulated precisely as a contingency diluting itself in a hostile cosmos. Humanity can count on hostility, without this knowledge in any way bringing a guarantee of salvation.

Lovecraft's horror is nevertheless at times a *horror vacui*, since our writer endlessly populates the universe of the Mythos with innumerable and indomitable creatures, as if the perspective of the absence of such life-forms were a nightmare even more difficult to bear. At the peak of Lovecraftian terror, extramundane creatures afford a vicarious consolation before a perhaps even more terrifying possibility: that of an absolute void of life-forms. Have we then arrived at the limit of the Lovecraftian Mythos? How to conceptualize a world of *absolute phenomena*, deprived of any personhood, of subjectivity of any sort? In other



words, the possibility of a radical *outsideness*?

Is it possible to think some sort of subject, some dreamworld, some form of (beyond) spacetime once all life-forms existing in the universe have been overcome? This extreme limit of Lovecraftian literature, sometimes suggested, timidly sketched in some phrase of some story, is the point of departure for a post-historicist and post-anthropic metaphysics to fully address. The challenge turns even more acute when it becomes necessary to postulate the possibility of access to this reality from life as it is now, even if it, as we have seen, must also be redefined in its entirety in terms of the understanding and study of its true potentialities. This will involve an approach to explaining what an *absolute phenomenon* could consist in, freed from its bond with the perceiver (even considering the most daring positions advanced by Lovecraft) and from the relation that ties it to the substrate of life.

This is why the universe will no longer be able to be thought in the terms proper to a cosmos ordered according to the laws so far discovered by science. The multiverse posited by Lovecraft introduces a *crack*, not only in life, or in the subject, but in the Universe itself. The multiverse that Lovecraft leaves as a problematic inheritance for philosophy is ruled by a *principle of disjunction* that is found in the very Being of an impossible totality. A disjunct multiverse demands a science that can go beyond all known systems. It demands a science that, without renouncing access to the real and to truth, can authentically state what being up to the challenge of the apprehension of such an outrageous cosmos means for thought; a science that, perhaps, may even open the gates and enter into the disjunction in question, approaching the knowledge of worlds separable from all Being.

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\* English in the original —T.N.



Astrophobos  
or  
*In-harmonia Mundi*

Glosses on Lovecraft's Poetry

I

H.P. Lovecraft's poetic works are generally not as well known as his stories. They are nevertheless wholly a part of what I call Lovecraft's *Scripta*: a heterogeneous set made up of stories of various length (some co-written), philosophical essays, journalistic writings, texts on science, literary criticism, politics, travel writings, notes on various subject matters and of varied tone, and a copious correspondence. There are many possible articulations within this textual mass. It is very much a matter of discussion whether Lovecraft himself believed in the mythology he had created. There are signs, in his essays and letters, that the deep tenor of the philosophy deployed in the stories was that of the writer, though not the exterior form of the mythology.

So there are ways of distinguishing the various positions Lovecraft took according to the texts. But this is not a simple matter when it comes to the poetry. One could maintain that his poetry belongs to different registers of the *corpus*: on one hand, the poetic material is often used to communicate the literary mythology, though the deeper root-sense seems to show Lovecraft's ultimate convictions; on the other, we find poems with no relation to the basic mythologemes. And the combinatory possibilities are multiplied not only in comparing diverse poems but also within the structure of a single poem.

This is why, in this article, I will have to limit my analysis to a small set of poems, all of which have the double trait of belonging to the central mythologemes of the narrative work as well as being capable of transmitting the philosophy underlying Lovecraftian myth. My approach, then, is based on the hypothe-



sis that it is possible to rigorously distinguish a philosophy at work in the mythology of the writer from Providence. Lovecraft's philosophical studies and interests are beyond question, but, at the same time, his ultimate metaphysical beliefs were quite varied (even mutually contradictory on occasion), and always deeper and more rigorous than his exegetes tend to suppose.

Indeed, as might be expected, literary criticism on Lovecraft's work has advanced with firmer steps, while the study of his philosophy still has a long way to go. Lovecraft's philosophical thinking covers a variety of topics so great that it would be impossible to take it up here.<sup>106</sup> Therefore I will concentrate solely on Lovecraft's cosmological vision—and I will only take up what I would like to call a “hypercosmological hypothesis” in which his concerns are inscribed. The hypothesis presupposes that Lovecraft framed his work within a certain scientific ideal, which became the epistemological basis on which to set up a philosophy concerning the material universe and humanity's destiny.

Lovecraft's scientific ideal, given the time in which he lived, was precisely that of the most advanced physics. Greatly familiar with astronomical history and practice, Lovecraft was always interested in the potential for thought as well as the literary possibilities that Einstein's discoveries and the Copenhagen interpretation had placed in the hands of the learned. Thus, even if he was not the first writer to build bridges with the physical sciences, he was certainly the most rigorous and important writer of weird fiction in his generation, postulating “ideal science” as a scientific ideal for any future philosophy. We must admit that contemporary philosophy has not responded to this challenge in its entirety and with all its consequences.

In their structure, Lovecraft's verses correspond perfectly to the principle of parallelism in poetic artifice so magisterially set

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<sup>106</sup> See the preceding study, *H.P. Lovecraft: The Disjunction in Being*.

out in structural linguistics.<sup>107</sup> However, my objective in these pages is not to attempt a "microscopy"<sup>108</sup> of poetological forms, but rather to focus on the macroscopy implied by their inscription in a universe that is postulated as a rupture with the ancient and medieval conception of the astronomical order. In a way that no other writer has done, Lovecraft defends the thesis that the philosophy of our time has not yet been able to think the ultimate ontological consequences of the revolution produced in the heart of the physical model from Galileo to Einstein.

Philosophy certainly has taken modern physics into account, but, as Lovecraft saw, in an entirely insufficient manner, since it has not been able to reinvent its concepts so as to bring them to the height of the new challenges brought forth by this science. In this sense, Western metaphysics is still the epistemic descendent of a Greco-Latin, Christian cosmos, while Lovecraft's cosmological poetology seeks to enter into the abysses of a universe completely alien to the categories of the millenary tradition of Western onto-theology. So as to understand the reach and significance of the Lovecraftian wager, we should first of all examine some traits of the classical and Christian conception of the cosmos.

## II

Pre-Platonic cosmology is extremely varied, though on the whole it is much more ominous than that set out in classical philosophy. Due to considerations of brevity, here I will only take up that of Anaximander, who is thought to have written the oldest dictum of Western philosophy, and in so doing to have created a destiny and a destination that are difficult to circumscribe or overcome. This fragment was written approximately 2600 years ago. It was the Neo-Platonist Simplicius who, around 530 C.E., composed a lengthy treatise entitled *In Aristotelis Physicorum*

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<sup>107</sup> Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. III, 39. The "poetic function" founded in the axis of equivalences should be contrasted with the "zero function" as empty space that makes all tropes possible (Hamacher, *Pan-la Filologia*, 23).

<sup>108</sup> Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. III, 465.



*libros commentaria*, one of the greatest ancient commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*. In a passage there, Simplicius preserved (possibly copying it from Theophrastus' manual) a textual citation from Anaximander, in all likelihood written a thousand years earlier.<sup>109</sup> I will first of all translate the fragment so as to analyze its connotations:

[the principle... of beings is the infinite (*to apeiron*)]  
out of which is the generation for living things, into  
which again does their destruction take place, ac-  
cording to what must needs be; for they make  
amends and give reparation to each other for their  
offence (*adikias*), according to the ordinance of  
time.<sup>110</sup>

What is the *apeiron*? One could say that it represents the region proper to the divinologico-cosmologico-political. It is a political concept since it is said that the *apeiron* governs (*kybernai*). Gigon grasped that some divinity was at stake here. However, it is not a personal god but rather "the divine," and that is why Aristotle says that the infinite governs all things.<sup>111</sup> However, "to govern" does not suggest a higher or exterior power that regulates the action of contraries. This ordered action is *immanent* to the whole, even when it transcends its parts.

The opposites that are governed here refer to the four elements that Aristotle enumerates: hot, cold, dry, and wet in their mutual contradictory interaction (the cold heats up, the hot cools down, the dry is moistened, etc.). Thus, in the *apeiron*, there is a rupture of equilibrium due to the prevalence of one of the contraries "being formed separately so as to alternate with its annihilation by the other contrary, which was perhaps followed, cyclically, by another moment of equilibrium."<sup>112</sup> That is to say

<sup>109</sup> On Anaximander, Kahn's *Anaximander* continues to be of great importance.  
<sup>110</sup> [Ludueña's translation is adapted from Comacava, *Presocráticos*. I have adapted Kahn's so as to reflect Ludueña's concerns. —T.N.]

<sup>111</sup> Gigon, "Die Theologie der Vorsokratiker", 125-154. On Anaximander, cf. *Physics* I, 3, 203b.

<sup>112</sup> Eggers Lan and Juliá, *Los filósofos de Mileto*, 115.

that, from the elements contained by the Unbounded, their contraries are generated, and that they are destroyed by tending to these contraries.

It is important to note that here that other testimonies, such as that of Pseudo-Plutarch, point out that "the infinite is the entire cause of the generation and destruction of everything, setting out from which the heavens and all the worlds are set apart."<sup>113</sup> We should probably interpret this to mean that, for Anaximander, there is a cycle of annihilation for each existing universe (*kosmos*) and the beginning, in an eternal circuit, of a new one. The notion of injustice at play in this fragment is related to a substantial order of the world together with a (perhaps sinister) idea of *adikia* wherein deified cosmic forces of an indefinite order intervene.

The sort of necessity at work is that of historical time, which opens up when guilt presides over the destinies of the cosmos and human life. The *economic necessity of guilt* is precisely what the fragment establishes with its provocative and scandalous proposition. As Wilamovitz-Möllendorff, philologist and great rival of Nietzsche, pointed out in a study on ancient penal law: "all transgression (*Verfehlung*) is an *adikema* until it is expiated."<sup>114</sup> According to this philologist, this implies that any crime creates disequilibrium in the order of the cosmos.

*Adikia* therefore unleashes a mystical power whose reaction is the restoration of order, returning the crime against its author. But this economic reparation is cosmic and divine. That is why Theseus, in Euripides' *Suppliants*, will have recourse to prayer: he must ask for the aid of the *adikoumenoi*, the "victims of an injustice" to have the support of the divinity.<sup>115</sup> All this leads to the conclusion that, beyond any reasonable doubt, the Anaximander

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<sup>113</sup> Pseudo-Plutarch, *Stromata*, fr. 2 (12A10), in Eggers Lan and Juliá, *Los filósofos de Mileto*, 124-125.

<sup>114</sup> "Das attische ausgebildete Recht geht eben von dem absolut Gerechten aus: die Moral ist auch hier das Massgebende. Die Rechtsordnung, die wir Staat nennen, erscheint dazu geschaffen, der Gerechtigkeit zur allgemeinen Herrschaft zu verhelfen. Jede Verfehlung ist ein *adikema*; so lange sie nicht gebüßt ist, dauert das *adikein*: man redet davon immer im *Präsens*" (Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Zum ältesten Strafrecht der Kulturvölker*, 24).

<sup>115</sup> Euripides, *Suppliants*, v. 301 sq.



fragment is referring to eminently *juridical* categories and, at the same time, accounts for concomitant *cosmologico-economic* phenomena.

From the perspective of philosophers such as Anaximander, existence is condemned to extinction due to an intrinsic juridical guilt that must be expiated in a sentence, always a condemnation, established and carried out by time as the judge. So then existence is, from the normative point of view, an entity judicially culpable of having come to light and therefore its atonement, in the terms of cosmic justice, will consist in the punishment of its extinction. Human and cosmic justice, then, are certainly placed in correspondence here. Just as human existence is thought in economico-legal terms, so is the *kosmos* in which it is placed.

Against this background, the philosophers, from Plato on, will offer a very different image of the cosmos (even when there are elements obviously taken over from the old tradition of the pre-Platonic sages). In certain religious currents, such as Gnosticism, the models of classical philosophy will again be dyed in more somber colors.<sup>116</sup> The classical conception of the universe is exemplified, for example, in Plato's *Timaeus*:

[The Demiurge's] intentions in so doing were these: First, that as a living thing [the universe] should be as whole and perfect as possible and made up of complete parts. Second, that it should be just one universe, in that nothing would be left over from which another one just like it could be made. Third, that it should not get old and diseased. [...] That is why [the Demiurge] concluded that he should fashion the world as a single whole, composed of all wholes, perfect [*teleon*] and free of old age [*ageron*] and disease [*anoson*].<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> See Denzey, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity*.

<sup>117</sup> There are numerous studies on this matter. Nevertheless, I would like to underline the importance of Cornford (*Plato's Cosmology*), Vlastos (*Plato's Universe*), and Gloy (*Studien zur platonischen Naturphilosophie im Timaios*). On Platon-

Thus the form of the Cosmos is modeled by the Demiurge according to a triplicity that makes up the essence of its order: it is a Whole whose *perfection* is the product of its *substantial immutability* and the absence of all constitutive *corruption*. This vision is then reinforced in later Platonism, as can be seen in the *Commentary* of Proclus on this Platonic dialogue:

Furthermore that all this is done in accord with what's right introduces an image of Justice who orders all things along with Zeus [...] an image of the cause that illuminates the universe with the demiurgic beauty, and the hospitality gifts of the exchange that is determined by the special properties of the divinities [...] by activating their own powers, [the gods] contribute to the completion of the Demiurge's one overriding providential order of the universe.<sup>118</sup>

It is still a matter of debate as to how many of these Platonic reinterpretations are due to Syrianus, Proclus' teacher.<sup>119</sup> Whatever the answer, the important aspect is the introduction of Justice as a constitutive element of astronomy in the Platonic tradition. This clearly shows, in fact, that the ancient cosmos is not the result of divine and human laws, of an impersonal planetary movement, but that it is on the contrary an ethically permeated universe, constitutively oriented towards the Good. From this perspective, it is no longer possible to conceive of a merely mathematical astronomy; rather, the mathematization of ancient cosmology is consubstantial with ethics.

And, *mutatis mutandis*, all ethics is anchored in a precise cosmology. Here ethics is not merely the properly human form of life; every individual decision, each gesture that models a life,

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ic astronomy, cf. Knorr, "Plato and Eudoxus on the planetary motions". [Citation from *Timaeus* 32D-33A. I have used Zeyl's translation, adapting "complete" to "perfect" for *teleon* to hold more closely to the text used by Ludueña —T.N.]

<sup>118</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, 1, 26.

<sup>119</sup> See Wear, *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato's Timaeus and Parmenides*.



must be in conformity with the Whole greater than humanity, and that turns out to be the source where it can drink so as to constitute its *modus vivendi*. Thus considered ancient astronomy is a form of cosmological *ethos* and all determination of human actions requires a *radical exteriority* on which human action rests. In this sense, there is no possibility of reducing the moral law to the world of human customs: on the contrary, ethical forms of life are the result of humanity's granted insertion into the order of a transhuman cosmos.

It is from this conceptual triplicity that stamps the ethicity of the ancient cosmos that a basic impossibility is posited: "it is clear that the Universe is not infinite."<sup>120</sup> For this very reason, in the *Treatise on the World*, Pseudo-Aristotle maintains:

Thus then a single harmony orders the composition of the whole—heaven and earth and the whole Universe—by the mingling of the most contrary principles. The dry mingling with the moist, the hot with the cold, the light with the heavy, the straight with the curved, all the earth, the sea, the ether, the sun, the moon, and the whole heaven are ordered by a single power extending through all [...] forcing the most contrary natures in it to live in agreement with one another and thus contriving the permanence of the whole. [...] Harmony preserves the universe.<sup>121</sup>

The triple principle of cosmic order, then, is preceded by a superior instance that makes possible such an articulation: the *harmonia* expressed in the very structure of the cosmos, which permits it to remain a steady seat for human inhabitation. It was on this basis that astrology, as an astro-ethical science, operated. Here is how one of its most conspicuous ancient authors puts it:

<sup>120</sup> Aristotle, *De Caelo*, I, 7, 15 (276a15). See Bowen, *New Perspectives on Aristotle's De Caelo*.  
<sup>121</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 396b-397a. [Here I have used the translation by E.S. Foster in the Barnes *Complete Works*—T.N.]

A certain power emanating from the eternal ethereal substance is dispersed through and permeates the whole region about the earth, which throughout is subject to change, since, of the primary sublunar elements, fire and air are encompassed and changed by the motions in the ether, and in turn encompass and change all else, earth and water and the plants and animals therein.<sup>122</sup>

Astrology becomes possible once one of (what we could call) the central *themata*<sup>123</sup> of the ancient cosmovision takes on consistency: the polarity that exists between the harmony of the Whole and the influence of a perfect universe on the life that it is called to protect and encourage.<sup>124</sup> The elements of this unifying vision of the cosmos can be found in an exemplary form in an Orphic text, the *Hymn to Apollo*:

... lord of Delos, you are the eye that sees all,  
    you bring light to mortals,  
your hair is golden,  
    your oracular utterance is clear.  
Hear me with kindly heart  
    as I pray for people.  
You gaze upon all  
    the ethereal vastness,  
upon the rich earth you look  
    through the twilight.  
In the quiet darkness  
    of a night lit with stars

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<sup>122</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 5-7.

<sup>123</sup> I use the concept of *thema* in the precise sense given to it by Holton in *The Scientific Imagination*, that is, as the organizing matrix of problematics. The notion of *thema* must be conceptually and methodologically distinguished from that of paradigm.

<sup>124</sup> On ancient astronomy, in all its geographico-cultural manifestations and in its more technical aspects, see Neugebauer's monumental *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*. In terms of the relations between astronomy, chronology, and astrology, the indispensable reference is North's *Stars, Minds and Fate*.





perspective, we can articulate a cosmic taxonomy, with the astropolitical government of an anthropically oriented universe, oriented to the well-being and flourishing of the sages. In this sense, beyond the profound transformations that Christianity will bring to this vision,<sup>127</sup> its fundamental notes will be preserved and redefined on the basis of the same integrative vision of the human in a universe decidedly favorable to the presence of the human race (beyond certain specifics deriving from the mythologeme of original sin which I cannot enter into here).

In fact, Christian theology can only be understood setting out from the cosmological principle of *ordinatio ad unum*, that is to say, that all of nature obeys a macrocosmic principle, deriving from a sovereign and creator God, prime mover and guarantor of the motion of the spheres.<sup>128</sup> At the same time this principle has its correlate in the microcosmic ordering of (animate and inanimate) bodies, and of sublunar nature as a whole. If all cosmological principles are also political, it is possible to maintain with Thomas Aquinas: "whatever is in accord with nature is best, for in all things nature does what is best. Now, every natural governance is governance by one."<sup>129</sup>

In this way, maintains Thomas, just as in the microcosm bees have a queen, in the same way, "in the whole universe there is one God, creator and master of all things" according to the

<sup>127</sup> On this point see Duhem, *Le système du monde*, in particular vols. 3 to 6.

<sup>128</sup> "Dico ergo, quod primus modus actionis soli Deo convenit; sed secundus modus etiam aliis convenire potest: et per modum istum dicendum est, corpora caelestia causare generationem et corruptionem in inferioribus, inquantum motus eorum est causa omnium inferiorum mutationum. Sed cum omnis motus sit actus motoris et moti, oportet quod in motu relinquatur virtus motoris et virtus mobilis: unde ex ipso mobili, quod corpus est, habet virtutem movendi inferiora corpora ad dispositiones corporales. Ex parte autem motoris, qui est substantia spiritualis, quaecumque sit illa, habet virtutem movendi ad formas substantiales, secundum quas est esse specificum, quod divinum esse dicitur. Relinquitur autem virtus spiritualis substantiae in motu corporis caelestis, ad modum quo virtus motoris relinquatur in instrumento: et per hunc modum omnes formae naturales descendunt a formis quae sunt sine material' (Scriptum super Sententias, d. 15, q. 1, a. 2), and *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 82, 8: "Sic ergo patet quod corpora inferiora a Deo per corpora caelestia reguntur."

<sup>129</sup> Aquinas, *On Kingship*, 12 (Ch. 3, § 19).



principle that "all multitude derives from one."<sup>130</sup> For the same reason, then, in human *societas*, "the best will be that governed by one."<sup>131</sup> Thomas enunciates the same idea when he declares that the things of the human world must be "ordered with respect to each other in a semblance of the order found in the universe."<sup>132</sup> From which it follows that all human communities are but a reflection of the cosmic and angelic order on one hand, and, on the other, a complementary fragment of the set made up of the *respublica generis humani*: Christianity as led by the exclusive government of the triune God.

For just this reason, some philosophers, even in the Renaissance, will put the legitimacy of astrology into doubt, precisely on the basis of the sense of cosmic order. So, in one of the most original Biblical commentaries of the Renaissance we read:

We should honor and exalt this noble creation [the living universe] [... but as] the Divine Artificer compounded our souls in the same mixing bowl and of the same elements as the celestial souls let us take care not to wish ourselves the slaves of those whom nature wished to be our brothers [...]. Therefore we ought to beware lest, like many as-

<sup>130</sup> In a Christian theological way, Scholasticism will interpret the famous passage from Aristotle (*Metaphysics* XII, 1076a), itself relying on a philosophico-political interpretation of Homer (*Illiad* II, 204).

<sup>131</sup> "Adhuc: ea, quae sunt ad naturam, optime se habent: in singulis enim operatur natura quod optimum est. Omne autem naturale regimen ab uno est. In membrorum enim multitudine unum est quod omnia movet, scilicet cor; et in partibus animae una vis principaliter praesidet, scilicet ratio. Est etiam apibus unus rex, et in toto universo unus Deus factor omnium et rector. Et hoc rationabiliter. Omnis enim multitudo derivatur ab uno. Quare si ea quae sunt secundum artem, imitantur ea quae sunt secundum naturam, et tanto magis opus artis est melius, quanto magis assequitur similitudinem eius quod est in natura. necesse est quod in humana multitudine optimum sit quod per unum regatur" (Aquinas, *De regno ad regem Cypri*, I, 2, 9). On the problem of the relation between a cosmological principle and a political one, see Lenoir.

<sup>132</sup> "Quia vero homo habet et intellectum et sensum et corporalem virtutem, haec in ipso ad invicem ordinantur, secundum divinae providentiae dispositionem, ad similitudinem ordinis qui in universo invenitur, nam virtus corporea subditur sensitivae et intellectivae virtuti, velut exequens earum imperium; ipsa sensitiva potentia intellectivae subditur, et eius imperio continetur". (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 81. 4.

signing and attributing to heaven more than is necessary, we resist the will of the Artificer and the order of the universe and, while seeking to please, actually displease the very heaven which has the plans of God and the order of the world much at heart.

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Pico, author of the well-known *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, like other philosophers hostile to certain kinds of divination thought that astrology could become dangerous for the same reasons others defended it, that is, in the name of the harmony of the cosmos.<sup>134</sup> For some, this harmony amounted to an intervention of cosmic forces in human destiny; for the others, God had created a universe in which the spheres moved in perfection, leaving freedom of action only to the humanity they are destined to serve.

Here it is possible to introduce a division in history (radicalizing positions of an ancient tradition) to distinguish, on one hand, natural history (the operation of the cosmos) and civil history (including human achievements). Divinity certainly intervenes in both histories, as Renaissance philosophers posit.<sup>135</sup> But were it not for the divine ligament, civil history might begin to detach from its link to the cosmos, since there is already a new kind of fissure in which human action has begun its long but sure process of emancipation, leading finally to modern conceptions of a human history divorced from natural events.<sup>136</sup>

In this sense the place of the infinite may only be assigned to God (occupying what some will call "imaginary space"), while the cosmos is the site of the naturally infinite.<sup>137</sup> This certainty

<sup>133</sup> Pico Della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, 104-105 (II, 7).

<sup>134</sup> Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance*, 83-112.

<sup>135</sup> Bacon, *Descriptio Globi Intellectualis*, in *The Works*, vol. III, 728-729.

<sup>136</sup> In the abundant bibliography of Baconian studies, it is useful to refer to Ash, *Power, Knowledge, and Expertise in Elizabethan England*, 186-212, since he provides an adequate scientific background for Bacon's work.

<sup>137</sup> See Compton Carleton, *Philosophia universa*, 337, sectio IV, col. 2: "Dico itaque cum auctoribus secundae opinionae Deum esse in infinitis spatiis imaginantis extra coelum in immensum diffusis."



will find its end when the properties of the divine infinite are transferred to the totality of the extension of the cosmos. The space consolidated in Newton's theologico-political revolution will open up a challenge for philosophy that, from then on, has had extreme difficulty in taking into consideration the ontological implications of the radicality of the Newtonian gesture. Surprisingly, it is Lovecraft's writing that is one of the places where this thinking was taken to its ultimate consequences, beyond Newton even. And we will find some of these Lovecraftian intuitions in his disquieting poetry.

### III

The universe of the ancients and the medievals was ultimately an anthropic and closed one. This is why we find a sense of wonder before the spectacle of nature in various texts of the Greco-Roman and, of course, medieval and modern world. Newton still shared in a form of duality between the universe of modern science that he had brought to a peak of theoretical understanding, and the ancient cosmos, full of harmony and constituted as a necessary articulation between God and humanity.<sup>138</sup>

However, in H.P. Lovecraft's literary works, we find one of the most radical formulations of the philosophical implications of the new physical science with which Modernity made its entrance on the stage. First, a new *Stimmung* affected the soul of the modern human, as is expressed in "Despair":

O'er the midnight moorlands crying,  
Thro' the cypress forests sighing,  
In the night-wind madly flying,  
          Hellish forms with streaming hair;  
In the barren branches creaking,  
By the stagnant swamp-pools speaking,

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<sup>138</sup> This is the reason for the dilemmas that continue to concern scholars about the relation between Newton, theology, alchemy and astrology. On these problems, see Cowling (*Isaac Newton and Astrology*), Schaffer ("Newton's Comets and the Transformation of Astrology"), Dobbs (*The Janus Faces of Genius*).

Past the shore-cliffs ever shrieking;  
Damn'd demons of despair.<sup>139</sup>

The space in which humans should find their habitat is now revealed to be under the rule of a nature that is completely hostile to its occupant. The forces that lay hidden in its breast can no longer be placated except with rituals (only somewhat efficacious) that can only diminish the power of the "demons of despair" called to bring about the final rule of the natural world. For this reason, the value that had, up until now, been accorded to life, shifts:

Thus the living, lone and sobbing,  
In the throes of anguish throbbing,  
With the loathsome Furies robbing  
Night and noon of peace and rest  
But beyond the groans and grating  
Of abhorrent Life, is waiting  
Sweet Oblivion, culminating  
All the years of fruitless quest.<sup>140</sup>

In the new cosmovision, not only does life have nothing to offer humans, but death also appears on the horizon as the final and necessary form of rest before the new scene of an uninhabitable world. However, even as the world has transformed in a lasting way, Lovecraft's poetry shows that, at the origin of this uprootedness, we find the presence of the Ancient inhabitants of the cosmos who claim the substrate of human life for themselves anew. Before this threatening perspective, forgetting is not only the hope for the end of suffering but also the figure that stamps, first of all, the insubstantiality of all history, all achievements, all the monuments of what, at some point, were imagined to be the heights of a conquering human civilization. This is why the mystery of (human) life coincides with its absence of ontological privilege in a new, essentially inhuman cosmos. Thus in

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<sup>139</sup> "Despair", in *The Ancient Track*, 42-43.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*



"Life's Mystery" we read:

Lifel Ah, Lifel  
What may this fluorescent pageant mean?  
Who can the evanescent object glean?  
He that is dead is the key of Life—  
Gone is the symbol, deep is the grave!<sup>141</sup>

This is a point of view wherein the spectacle of the cosmos, once humanity's home, is now the perfected form of its tomb. However, this new situation is but the rendering explicit of what was waiting to be revealed since the beginning of time. It is not only that humanity discovers its new place in the cosmos, but something more—and thus the stupor—a sudden coming to consciousness about what was always there: the illusion of an anthropocentric universe was only a human dream based on nothing other than fantasy. All the Moderns had to do was crack open the spheres and see beyond them the spaces of the ether to find, here on our Earth, the tombstone that, since the beginning of the world, was set up for humanity by its legendary and primordial inhabitants.

The abyss extended between the old cosmos and the new post-Newtonian universe (we know Lovecraft's erudition in astronomical matters) and the philosophical consequences of this scission are thematized in the poem "Astrophobos":

In the Midnight heavens burning  
Thro' ethereal deeps afar  
Once I watch'd with restless yearning  
An alluring, aureate star;  
Ev'ry eve aloft returning,  
Gleaming nigh the Arctic Car.

Mystic waves of beauty blended  
With the gorgeous golden rays;  
Phantasies of bliss descended

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<sup>141</sup> "Life's Mystery", in *The Ancient Track*, 260.

In a myrrh'd Elysian haze;  
In the lyre-born chords extended  
Harmonies of Lydian lays.

And (thought I) lies scenes of pleasure,  
Where the free and blessed dwell,  
There each moment bears a treasure,  
Freighted with the lotus-spell,  
And there floats a liquid measure  
From the lute of Israfel.<sup>142</sup>

We can note that the poem begins with an invocation to the ancient cosmos, that ornate spectacle of humanly observable nature; the vision is crowned, precisely, with a harmony of the spheres that guarantees the union of micro- and macrocosmos. Here the cosmos is the natural home and rhythmic ordering of human life: society, thought, and forms of life are adequate to a One who contains it all in a taxonomy that is as precise as it is welcoming. Lovecraft's reference to the "lute of Israfel" is no doubt an ambiguous reference to Poe. On the one hand, it is an occasion to evoke his master and the great poem of 1831<sup>143</sup> where the Muslim archangel Israfel sings passionately to Heaven in concordance with the human lyre. On the other, it affiliates the master to the ancient cosmos, which, in Lovecraft's poem, is immediately unmasked as an illusion:

Thus I mus'd, when o'er the vision  
Crept a red delirious change;  
Hope dissolving to derision,  
Beauty to distortion strange;  
Hymnic chords in weird collision,  
Spectral sights in endless range.

Crimson burn'd the star of madness  
As behind the beams I peer'd;

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<sup>142</sup> "Astrophobos", in *The Ancient Track*, 29-30.

<sup>143</sup> "Israfel", in Poe, *Annotated Poems*, 171.

All was woe that seem'd but gladness  
Ere my gaze with Truth was sear'd;  
Cacodaemons, mir'd with madness,  
Through the fever'd flick'ring leer'd.

Now I know the fiendish fable  
That the golden glitter bore;  
Now I shun the spangled sable  
That I watch'd and lov'd before;  
But the horror, set and stable,  
Haunts my soul for evermore.<sup>144</sup>

Beyond the occasional allusion owing to an early Gothic influence, which will clearly give way in Lovecraft's poetry before a full materialism, what we can see here is the complete inversion of the classical cosmos. Where there was a perfect order, now there is a fiery inferno; where eternity once reigned, now pandemonium has taken its place; and where exemption from sickness and corruption once crowned the Platonic heavens, now fable meets delirium in the discovery of the true face of a hostile universe. That is why the humanity of the post-Newtonian universe is inhabited by the horror of finding itself before a space that was configured not to be its habitat but rather its silent tomb. Having arrived at this point, the new fantastic creatures of Lovecraftian mythology are called up to carry out their ominous mission of reclaiming their originary right to an Earth that humanity only inhabits by chance. As Lovecraft writes in "Nyarlathotep":

And at the last from inner Egypt came  
The strange dark One to whom the fellahs bowed;  
Silent and lean and cryptically proud,  
And wrapped in fabrics red as sunset flame.  
Throngs pressed around, frantic for his commands,  
But leaving, could not tell what they had heard;  
While through the nations spread the awestruck word

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<sup>144</sup> "Astrophobos", *ibid.*



That wild beasts followed him and licked his hands.

Soon from the sea a noxious birth began;  
Forgotten lands with weedy spires of gold;  
The ground was cleft, and mad auroras rolled  
Down on the quaking citadels of man.  
Then, crushing what he chanced to mould in play,  
The idiot Chaos blew Earth's dust away.<sup>145</sup>

The twilight of the ancient cosmos brings with it, in the Lovecraftian universe, the awakening of hidden divinities from a time long past, impossible for any human mind to conceive. The bowels of the Earth, in Lovecraftian mythology, are inhabited by hostile beings that, in industrial Modernity, return to life to defy humanity and its civilizational Titanism.<sup>146</sup> The greatest achievements of the human species are thus swept from the Earth's surface by creatures like the terrible Nyarlathothep, attracted, in an obscure ritual, by humanity itself calling for its own destruction. In this sense, Lovecraft's poetry is also an invocation, a theurgy that summons beings that the poet hopes will put an end to the world in which life has become impossible. This poetic figure, and political motto, is summed up in the figure of Chaos, which, in "Azathoth" takes on a quite precise profile:

Out in the mindless void the daemon bore me,  
Past the bright clusters of dimensional space,  
Till neither time nor matter stretched before me,  
But only Chaos, without form or place.  
Here the vast Lord of All in darkness muttered  
Things he had dreamed but could not understand,  
While near him shapeless bat-things flopped and  
fluttered

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<sup>145</sup> "Nyarlathothep", in *The Ancient Track*, 29-30.

<sup>146</sup> Lovecraft had been both witness and victim of that socio-economic organization (see Joshi, *HPL in his Time*, 364-388). In fact, his fluctuation from political conservatism to socialism cannot be explained except by grasping the diagnosis he had made of the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of modern democracy (Joshi, 346-363).

In Idiot vortices that ray-streams fanned.<sup>147</sup>

The Lovecraftian universe, though inheritor of post-Newtonian physics, is an overcoming of the laws of all science. It is certainly true, as Joshi has shown, that Lovecraft was an admirer of the philosophy of Bertrand Russell.<sup>148</sup> And in this sense, the universe prefigured by the stories characterized by the materialism of the final Lovecraftian period is also profoundly inhuman; that is to say, we no longer find in it the great polarities that had structured the world of *anthropos*. The gods are replaced by biologically diverse beings that have inhabited the universe for incommensurable eons before humanity; human laws are abolished, and the notions of good and evil lack any foundation; finally, the cosmos is revealed as the most inhospitable place conceivable for a species as insubstantial as the human.

However, from this perspective, Chaos is even beyond all space. It is no longer a matter of conceiving of an infinite God beyond space, like Compton-Carleton, but neither is it about merely adopting the point of view of a physics that extends the property of infinity to matter as a whole. Quite the contrary: the simultaneous assumption of the twilight of the gods and the unavoidable consequences of the physics of his time brought Lovecraft beyond the limits of science so as to interrogate himself, in a completely materialist way, about space and time as forms capable of being overcome without the necessity of divine transcendence.

It is true that these questions were not answered in the language of philosophy. That is why we still find allusions to a Lord of All which, not being any sort of god, is nevertheless an entity beyond all known biology. There where the philosophical question arises, Lovecraft ends up stopping it up with a metaphor or persona appropriate to bring the poetic cycle to its closure. The operation is certainly legitimate and even necessary for the combined literary wagers of weird tales and science fiction stories as well.

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<sup>147</sup> "Azathoth", in *The Ancient Track*, 74.

<sup>148</sup> Joshi, *HPL in his Time*, 294.

For philosophy, however, there is still a pending task left by Lovecraft (more than any other writer in these genres). That is: the macroscopic analysis of some paradigmatic poems of Lovecraft brings us to take on, as a future philosophical task, the consideration of what I call his "hypercosmological hypothesis". If this hypothesis allowed him an epistemological framework so as to place himself beyond the science of his time but still within a strict materialism, a conclusion imposes itself. The radical assumption of the universe of modern physics implies that the hypercosmological hypothesis leads to the nullification of the very concept of cosmos. Categorical homonymy no longer designates one self-same material reality, and astrophobia is the *Stimmung* that consecrates this rupture.

The habitat in which the human ecosystem is inscribed, and *a fortiori* the heavenly vault in which the Earth is placed, can no longer be explained by means of the complex resources of the ancient cosmos. *In-harmonia mundi* imposes itself as the new sign of the times and is perhaps the challenge that philosophy must think if it wishes to cease lagging behind the worlds explored by science and literature.

Thus the first step onto this path should be to admit that the twentieth-century critique of humanism and anthropocentrism was insufficient. What was denominated a critique was but the necessary (but also basic) acknowledgment of a much more radical state of affairs, which is still far from being explored. I mean the philosophical consequences of the undoing of the notion of cosmos, and the consequent and inevitable transformation of the placement of the ecosystem of life as a whole in the order of the spheres, which are now not only *before* humanity but also called upon to do without life.



## Three Fragments and Three Figures After Ludueña's Lovecraft

Alejandro de Acosta

*The Disjunction in Being* and "Astrophobos" are not only studies of Lovecraft but also speak to a broad array of questions hinging on an epochal transition for philosophy. Since, as Fabián Ludueña writes, the future of philosophy is less than clear, given its penchant to self-destruction, its precarious academic existence, and, I would add, the corrosive persistence of its mutant twin, *theory*, I will simply underline, and as it were spontaneously expand upon, a few of the remarkable ideas I found as I worked through these studies. I have expressed each idea as a *fragment* from *The Disjunction in Being*, fragments not from the beginning but from the possible future of philosophy, pairing each one with a shadowy *figure* impersonating its insight or perspective.

Before that, a word about how my reflections were made possible by Ludueña's *style*. In this book's prose there is an imperceptible passage from explication to elaboration, such that at first F.L. is telling us what may be discerned from Lovecraft's writing in a more or less exegetical mode, and then, in a subtle transformation from sentence to sentence, one senses he is describing not Lovecraft's but our universe (or multiverse, as he eventually has it)... this is clearly because, as he writes, Lovecraft is not philosophizing *about* our universe but, in his weird fiction, speculatively describing the universe within which any philosophy (as *theoria*, but also as practice or way of life) unfolds. Concomitantly, Ludueña does not *interpret* Lovecraft, applying some theoretical schema or another; rather he uncovers Lovecraft's own possible speculative scheme.

Fragment:

*A society is the most profoundly inhuman form that humans have found to organize their life together.*

Figure:

The thinker of cruelty

The fragment arises in the context of Ludueña's discussion of the *arche-rite*. It is a disturbing statement, proposing the maddening possibility that every known social form, in its customs and rituals, is a degradation of some other form, unknown to us, once carried out by beings about which the least that can be said is that they would not care about us. Which, in fact, is how so many experience human society: as an impersonal, alien force. I mean the State, but also the crowd; I mean police and armies, military and industrial, but also many gangs and many families. As forms of social organization of various scales, they could be seen to reproduce one or more ritual forms in a way that seems to both naturalize (in a restricted understanding of nature) what is alien in them, and brutalize the human form in its animality. There is ultimately no adjusting to social forms seen as survivals of the *arche-rite*, and there is truth no improving them.—What about the well-adjusted among us, those who do not agree, or at least say they do not agree, with such a vision of society? The first thing to note is that they are no less likely to share in this perspective, though their participation is usually kept within the bounds of fiction: horror stories, for example, of the sort Lovecraft wrote, and all of their contemporary verbivocovisual interpretations, versions, and counterparts. From ancient tragedy on, what we call literature has consistently concerned itself with a cruelty for which some (or all) seem destined. The second thing to note is that the well-adjusted quite regularly turn out not to be so well-adjusted after all, and in their eventual confessions we learn that clinging to the social, to some form or another of the *arche-rite*, turns out to have been, for these anomic souls, a kind of torture.—In any case, from this perspective, all of the old talk of alienation is here given an entirely different basis: it is not that humanity is alienated from itself, or from God, but rather

that an entirely alien set of forces—*intentions*, one might say—inhabits societies. Apart from such forces, there may be no societies. This sort of alienation cannot be undone or resolved—except, I suppose, in the unbinding of the social itself. Needless to say there is nothing inherently good or desirable in such unbinding.

Someone who is capable of thinking from this perspective, and who opts to do so, is a *thinker of cruelty*, redeploying at the cosmic scale an idea common to Nietzsche and Artaud. Such a thinker is witness to cruelty as the principal vector of the arche-rite—at least of how creatures like us experience it. It is a little bit like Pierre Clastres' description of initiatic violence, what he named "torture in primitive societies," which he theorized was a way of preventing the organization of the State: *It is proof of their admirable depth of mind that the Savages knew all that ahead of time, and took care, at the cost of a terrible cruelty, to prevent the advent of a more terrifying cruelty: the law written on the body is an unforgettable memory.*<sup>149</sup> But the thinker of cruelty inflects this thought in a different direction, noting that the more terrifying cruelty is in fact not preventable. This is not because the State is inevitable, but because society is. And the thinker sees that society is born out of, rests on, and perpetually returns to the ultimately inhuman arche-rite, realizing that it has been our mistake to think cruelty was an exclusively human affair.

Here the thinker of cruelty could share a lesson for the future thinking of politics and what might become of ethical experience. There is a disjunction, the thinker notes, between the relative softening of the arche-rite's action on us (even when, in cases such as "torture in primitive societies," the ritual seems to suggest otherwise), and the absolute unbinding of the social that it would take to truly undo the arche-rite's repetition. In great sobriety, the thinker of cruelty may consider that it was a tremendous mistake, shared by some of a religious stripe, as well as various kinds of progressive political ideologies, to think that we could do away with cruelty by converting humans, or improving

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<sup>149</sup> *Society against the State*, translated by Robert Hurley and Abe Stein. Zone Books, 1989: 188.



humanity. What if nothing of the sort were possible? One would end up with a position perhaps not far from what others have recently denominated *cosmic pessimism*—and, in terms of human society, the thinker of cruelty has two equally disturbing paths to consider. The first, of a broadly liberal sort, would seek to minimize cruelty through institutional means—from laws to education. That liberalism has always had as its background either a benevolent God or a more or less knowable, predictable cosmos should make anyone acquainted with the present perspective deeply skeptical of this path, which assumes the possibility of progress. The second, something like an ethics, would seek to establish the maximum psychic distance between oneself and society, understood as the institutionalization of a cruelty one now perceives as ambient in even the most innocent exchanges. The question remains open as to who could teach or learn, who could practice, such a way of life. In any case, what the thinker of cruelty does not engage in is some kind of historical pessimism or misanthropy. (Humanism and misanthropy, historical optimism and pessimism: so many overestimations of our own importance, so many underestimations of the disjunction in Being.) The thinker regards humanity as no more guilty than innocent; in this thinking humanity is radically decentered (as F.L. illustrates in “Astrophobos” especially), because the arche-rite, even as it inexorably constitutes and crisscrosses our cultures and activities, has nothing especially to do with us.

Fragment:

*One of the most frightening theories of the subject...  
...the haunted subject...*

Figure:

**The Vindicated Paranoiac**

Even if the thinker of cruelty finds no audience, this perspective tends to vindicate the visions of the hermits, religious or otherwise, who opted to turn away from the social world they were born into. Their gesture, incomprehensible to most, seems at the very least to be an equally valid, perhaps more insightful, way of facing this idea of every society as the transmitter of the arche-rite's cruelty—of culture itself as cruelty. Of course for many hermits this was all a strong intuition, expressed to whatever extent possible in their own language and experience. But there is also a matter of the tutelary spirits and demons that may manifest in solitude—of *possession*. Just as the hermits and perhaps some of the mad fools of past (and present?) times would be vindicated by the idea that human society is at its core inhuman, so another sort of madness, and another kind of extreme vision, is vindicated by Ludueña's reconstruction of a Lovecraftian theory of the subject. If the simple and not-so-simple dualisms of philosophers and theologians were limited to the human mind and body, perhaps the various refutations that have now become commonplace would go on being relevant. Ludueña, who for his part answers in a note that he considers dualism to be less flawed than is usually understood (happily ruining the founding exercise of so many introductory philosophy classes), suggests to us that we consider, through Lovecraft, a kind of inhabitation or haunting of the subject by other subjects, consciousnesses anterior not only to its genesis but to humanity itself. Not only are all societies founded on the ultimately alien arche-rite, but the subject cannot be divided from the possibility of being inhabited, possessed, by other, equally alien, selves.

Someone who says that our voices are often enough their voices is a second figure, a *vindicated paranoiac*. In their outlandish perspective what in us is eternal is perhaps this exposure, open-

ness, or susceptibility to alien inhabitation (as in Lovecraft's "The Shadow out of Time"). Illustrating this perspective, Ludueña aptly cites Lovecraft citing Lamb: *the archetypes are in us, and eternal*. Lamb glosses these archetypes, in their immaterial insistence, with Spenser's poetic phrase *names whose sense we see not*. For the vindicated paranoiac, all of the philosophical efforts to discern and define the subject come to seem like so many *senseless* collaborations with *names whose sense we see not*, "*groping blindly through time* from some unsuspected abyss in Nature" as Lovecraft had it.<sup>150</sup> Likewise, all of the efforts in the philosophy and theory of the twentieth century to undo, dismantle, fragment, relativize, and in one way or another dethrone the subject come to seem like so many attempted and failed *exorcisms*. The evident failure of those efforts, not so much in the cogency of the ideas and texts as in the ongoing return of all sorts of technologies of the self, shows the paranoiac a perhaps inhuman persistence. As though something *won't let us go*. And, third, the paranoiac tells us that if cruelty is the vector of the arche-rite, in this perspective language and technics are at least in part the expression and extension of the subject's alien inhabitation.

To the old conversation about the inhuman scale of technological 'progress', and the need for a humanized technology (or a non-technological humanity, the exasperated radical fringe of this position, always edging towards the paranoiac position), the vindicated one now brings this indigestible fact, that technology is indeed inhuman—it is part of the seizure of matter, including our very bodies, of course, in the arche-rite; but it is at the same time anthropogenetic, bonded to every possible cultural form. This thought leads down an equally fascinating and troubling path—to use Lovecraft's keyword, a *weird* path. For (to keep the lesson local in time and space) the technologically accelerated reproduction of what in the U.S. we call, with nauseating ease, *identities*, would be seen by the vindicated paranoiac as a project that has nothing to do with the gregariousness of mammals, and everything to do with a kind of prolonged and (for the moment) indirect torture. And it would be obvious enough to that figure

<sup>150</sup> "The Shadow out of Time", 344.



that the other side of the same project is the fact that such phenomena unfold in a State that undertakes imprisonment and torture in a far more direct way—not to speak of drone warfare or other contemporary horrors. More broadly, as I noted, not only fools and hermits, but also the growing number of people who question civilization itself,<sup>151</sup> as concept and as historical reality, could find here the strangest accessory to their critique. For the vindicated paranoiac does not teach but shares a grasp of civilization, not as a wrong turn in human evolution (contrasted with an imagined ‘natural’ human way of life, as so many *naïfs* prefer to do) but rather as the set of varied yet interminable ways of combining culture (the expressions of the arche-rite) and technology (the arche-rite’s technological extensions, or ways of seizing the human animal’s body). But if the anti-civilization position is vindicated along with the visions of some paranoiacs, what form of life could manage, let alone express, this speculative enormity, remains entirely in question.

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<sup>151</sup> Most recently, see *Uncivilisation*, the manifesto of the Dark Mountain group (2009)

Fragment:

*The school ... is one of the forms par excellence of the rejection of human societas and its rituals.*

Figure:

### The Asocial Philosopher

It might seem strange at first that Ludueña opens his book with a brief, provocative meditation on philosophy and philosophers—what philosophy once was, how philosophers disappeared when the last school shut down, and how he understands philosophy's peculiar survival of that conclusion. That being a philosopher has always been a matter of schools has the merit of being a clearly stated claim; this matters when one compares Ludueña's claim that philosophers are no more to the many convoluted discussions of the end of philosophy that surfaced towards the end of the last millennium. The idea of philosophy's survival, this proposition that philosophy, in the absence of schools, somehow inhabits certain people Ludueña identifies not by their humanity or even animality but as *singularities*, is a claim at once stimulating and disturbing, which, I think, gains in coherence in the context of the preceding discussion.

This way of grasping philosophy's history and survival is, in a certain sense, also part of the broader thinking on the universe-as-multiverse to which the book invites. I would suggest that the "Overture" included here be read twice, as a preface and an epilogue. Or that the entire *Disjunction* be read twice, the first time as what it seems to be, a book on H.P. Lovecraft, and the second time as what it also is, a conceptual fugue—Lovecraftian variations on the perennial theme-question: *what is philosophy?* If, in a subtle way, *The Disjunction in Being* touches, one by one, on many of the major figures and concerns of twentieth-century philosophy, I suppose it is because F.L. wished to guarantee that his essay would have the maximum opportunity to contaminate their followers and commentators. Contaminate them—with what? Perhaps with the untimely figure of someone who rejects *human societas and its rituals: the asocial philosopher.*

In addition to the cosmological speculation of Anaximander

that Ludueña discusses, another of the stories about the beginning of philosophy usually comes down to some variant of this scene: someone, somewhere, is telling a traditional story, or sharing a religious vision, or repeating, in familiar words, a customary point of view. Suddenly some unauthorized individual, probably a stranger in some way, responds in the simplest but most disconcerting of ways: *why should we believe that and not anything else?* F.L. allows us the insight that this scene is less about belief and knowledge, truth and error, than it has been made out to be. It is about someone who has found a way to show, maybe teach, maybe even prove, the intuition of the arche-rite's action in and through myth and ritual. Here begins a long tradition of demythologizing as the peculiar task of philosophy. Xenophanes and Heraclitus not only spoke but also wrote down challenges to established beliefs based on no authority but their own untimely thought. But the transmission of this corrosive, questioning attitude was stabilized when Plato was able to incorporate, perhaps as a compromise with a society that tolerated his Academy, both the destabilizing exchange and a sublated form of myth into his dialogues and presumably his teaching. (Though we should remember that many, especially the most openly asocial, philosophers, certainly founded no schools, and, like Diogenes of Sinope, seem to have discovered some other sort of transmission.) So that, as the history of philosophy unfolded, the relation between master and student became the dramatization or practical staging of the first scene of untimely questioning, either in a Socratic dialogue or a public lecture first presenting, eventually engaging, a written text in a distant echo of the original speech situation. The student could be interlocutor or witness; in either case, the asocial content was transmitted in the spiritual exercise. The figure of the asocial philosopher recurs despite all of the compromises that had to be made with societies as they appeared, evolved, and sought to impose their form of the arche-rite on the recalcitrant schools. But what asocial philosophers illustrate in their very persons is in fact much stranger. The very form of the school makes recalcitrance possible, even as it also makes possible the philosopher's enthusiastic possession by the proper name of the Master (or God, or the State).



Possession: we return, perhaps, to Lamb's archetypes and Spenser's names. Is it possible that one of the most familiar psychological traits of the philosopher, or of today's philosophical singularities, namely that they are as it were *haunted* by certain proper names or sometimes even concepts (though not for all that always oppressed in this haunting) is a result of an ancient philosophical technology constructed precisely to intervene there where the arche-rite is at its most brutal, possession at its most uncannily manifest? Turning them, as it were, against themselves? (The secret of all human technics: modification of the arche-rite's action. It should not be forgotten that the protagonist of "The Shadow out of Time", severed from his body and shot as a separate consciousness into the distant past, finds opportunity to study and share knowledge with other souls so displaced.<sup>152</sup>) That is: philosophers know well what it is to deal with an inevitable archetype. The first philosophical school, the Academy, is the place of the teaching of one who gave the archetype a name (*idea*—the Greek word I mean). But I have found no better illustration of this dynamic relation to the archetype, the inhabiting subject, than this text concerning the fraught transmission of another school's teaching, far in time and space from that Academy. It is the cautionary story of Masotta, who brought Lacanian analysis to Argentina: *Masotta and his students grant ontological and axiological priority to an Other, which here is not only the purely nominal reality of Freud-Lacan; rather these two function as categories, dimensions, or elements. A Freud-Lacan who works as if behind me, as perpetually assimilable to an outside of my conscious teaching and study. As I necessarily internalize that outside, thinking it as mine (in me and for me), it is simultaneously assimilable to an unconscious, which is the deep sense of my consciousness. In this way my consciousness subtly becomes inessential for me—that is, everything that my consciousness grasps is not constitutive of the doctrine "reading of Freud by Lacan"—without for all that being able to sufficiently grasp what is essential (the reading of Lacan's work is "infinite").*<sup>153</sup> This is not the place to discuss psychoanaly-

<sup>152</sup> "The Shadow out of Time", 359-360.

<sup>153</sup> Carlos Correias, *La operación Masotta. Cuando la muerte también fracasa*. Interzona: Buenos Aires, 2007: 136, translation mine.



sis (even though it could be viewed precisely as the twentieth century's aborted attempt to restart, in the name of and secretly against science, the master-student transmission Ludueña indicates as the atomic form of the school). I am rather concerned with the way that study reveals (produces?) the proper names of the masters as archetypal inhabitants of the student's (and the teacher's!) consciousness. For Masotta and company this does not seem to have turned out well. But I would argue that what true philosophical study and teaching involve must pass through precisely this parodic phase of total possession, complete inhabitation. That is what I take Ludueña's presentation of philosophy as an *anthropotechnology* to mean: turning the evidence of the thinker of cruelty and the vindicated paranoiac into the asocial lesson.

This last figure, the recurrent asocial philosopher, teaches that the social propagation of myth is not to be rejected, questioned, or undermined solely because it is wrong, superstitious, irrational and so on. Rather this intolerable figure, in a moment of transparency, may reveal the still unresolved hostility of philosophy against society or civilization itself, its constitutive inhumanity or cruelty. For philosophy this became, often enough, a rejection of society's indiscipline when it comes to the passions. The complete discipline of the passions is, in point of fact, painfully impossible!—this is certainly true in our time of inhuman humanism, endlessly redeploying a cruelty “older than man and fated to survive him”.<sup>154</sup> A society (all societies) of the arche-rite is a society of passions, of sadness especially. The school is not a space that is safe from cruelty, but rather one where the maximum awareness of what a society is, of how its cruelty works, are cultivated (*it is proof of their admirable depth of mind that the Savages knew all that ahead of time...*) Or, put in parallel terms with regard to possession, where the truth of subjectivity is not escaped but explicated.—Now, anyone who truly studies agrees that study is interminable. This is not merely because of the endless discussions and countless texts to be read countless times, but also because of the endlessness of the project of put-

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<sup>154</sup> Lovecraft, “The Festival”, 115.

ting psychic distance between oneself (whatever that is) and a social form (every one) that is supremely at odds with the lesson.

All this said, it makes sense that the schools would have closed at some point, that the masters would have found no more students, that students would study in a confused way, not finding masters. It makes sense that the asocial philosopher would be reduced from a force to a mere figure. Historical societies, and the ones we know as well, have it as part of their functioning to interrupt the transmission, to redirect the student and the master to their places in a bureaucratic institution. But Ludueña does not leave it there. He writes that philosophy survives this end and—may I put it this way?—lives on. As the trace of a resistance against what is inhuman in every society, though not reinstating or glorifying pure humanity since there never was any—as knowledge, use, and tactical refusal of cruelty lived as a minimum ethics, a certain incomplete but potent discipline of the passions, humanly inhuman, training what is eternal in us on to other than Earthly horizons?